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## Encounters on the Eastern Front: The Royal Naval Armoured Car Division in Russia 1915-1920

Petty Officer Gerald Smyth began a diary on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1916, in a notebook he bought from the main store in Alexandrovsk, for 40 kopeks.<sup>1</sup> Smyth was a member of the Royal Naval Armoured Car Division, en route to fight with the Russian army on the Eastern Front. The division had left Liverpool too late to make it through the ice to Archangel'sk and on via the railway to Petrograd: they would remain stranded in Alexandrovsk, a small town north of Murmansk, until the ice melted in May.<sup>2</sup> Boredom may have played a part in Smyth's decision to start his diary: he began by writing up his experiences since boarding the *Umona* in early December. However, his decision also stemmed from a sense – shared by other members of the division – that his experiences would be something out of the ordinary line of war service. It was 'a novelty in the way of appointments'; Surgeon Lt-Commander King remembered, and a posting in great contrast to that of the infantrymen who really won the war, in the view of Commander Wells Hood.<sup>3</sup> Many members of the unit kept diaries, and between them they took countless photographs. George Martin's diary became the basis for a novel for teenagers by Joyce Marlow, published in 1967 as *Billy Goes to War*. In the trenches in Galicia in 1917, fighting alongside the rapidly disintegrating Russian army, Billy discusses developments in Russia's revolutionary summer with his comrades. Who was Alexander Kerensky, they want to know. Was he a Bolshevik? Who were the Bolsheviks anyway? 'I don't know why you're so bothered', says cockney Fred Harris. 'It's nothing to do with us'.<sup>4</sup>

Russia's war effort may have seemed remote to members of the Royal Naval Armoured Car Division and their fictional counterparts, but for strategists, economists,

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<sup>1</sup> G. H. Smyth diary, Imperial War Museum (IWM) 4190.

<sup>2</sup> Murmansk was founded in 1915, as the terminus of a new railway that would transport supplies to the interior from the Murman coast. Alexandrovsk, now Polyarny, was named only in 1896.

<sup>3</sup> W. H. King, 'Ten Months with the Russian Army' IWM 4172 f. 1; W. Wells Hood lecture, IWM 4257 f. 70. On wartime diary writing as a means of documenting both the remarkable and the mundane, see Marilyn Shevin-Coetzee and Frans Coetzee, *Commitment and Sacrifice, Personal Diaries from the Great War* (Oxford, 2015) pp. 1-15; Jessica Meyer, *Men of War, Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (London, 2009) pp. 48-49; Nancy Martin (2015) 'And all because it is war!': First World War diaries, authenticity and combatant identity', *Textual Practice* 29:7 (2015) pp.1245-1263.

<sup>4</sup> Joyce Marlow, *Billy Goes to War* (London, 1967) pp. 100-101.

and politicians in 1914-18, the connections between the two fronts were very clear. The Russian army relied on loans and munitions from their allies to support their war effort when it became apparent that they faced a long war. In turn, they played an essential role in occupying German divisions in the east as the western front became static: Sir John French, Commander of the British Expeditionary Force, remarked that ‘everything now *depends on Russia*’.<sup>5</sup> When the Russian front collapsed in 1917, Allied strategists counted the divisions moving west, and desperately supported any force that promised a reconstitution of the eastern front.<sup>6</sup>

The RNACD (comprising 500 men, 50 officers, 45 cars, 15 lorries and 50 motorcycles) fought under Russian command on three different fronts: in the Caucasus (in the summer and autumn of 1916), in Roumania (through the winter of 1916-17), and in Kerensky’s summer offensive in Galicia in 1917. This article does not offer a history of the unit’s military engagements.<sup>7</sup> Instead it sets the RNACD’s experiences in the broader context of the Anglo-Russian wartime relationship. In doing so, it contributes to several different historical fields. It contributes both to the history of the Anglo-Russian alliance and to the study of wartime diplomacy, drawing attention to decision-making processes, and problems, in the wartime alliance. It develops the literature on the Anglo-Russian supply relationship, relating the way that the unit was supplied and paid for to broader arrangements for Russian military supply. It touches also on the technological history of the First World War, by focusing on the technology and strategic purpose of armoured cars, the ways they were used, and the ways their designers and drivers thought they should be used, on the western and eastern fronts. It explores the impressions that men in the unit formed of the eastern front, offering a case study that builds on recent scholarly interest in the unexpected cultural encounters created by the war. Many members of the unit retained an interest in Russia, and this article also documents their involvement in interventionist schemes after 1917, adding

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<sup>5</sup> Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar: British Policy and Russia 1894-1917* (Oxford, 1995) p. 344.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations 1917-1921* vol. 1 (Princeton, 1961) pp. 162-163, Michael Carley, ‘The Origins of the French Intervention in the Russian Civil War January-May 1918: A Reappraisal’ *Journal of Modern History* 48:3 (September 1976) p. 421, p. 438.

<sup>7</sup> For a military history of the unit see Bryan Perrett and Anthony Lord, *The Czar’s British Squadron* (London, 1981), and Perrett’s recent *British Armoured Car Operations in World War I* (London, 2016). An account of their service on the eastern front is also given in Maksim Kolomiets, *Bronia Russkoi Armii: broneavtomobili i bronepoezda v pervoi mirovoi voine* (Moscow: Strategia KM, 2008) pp. 289-295.

thereby to our understanding of the motivations and rhetoric surrounding international intervention in Russia's civil war. Finally it touches on the memory of wartime experience, discussing the RNACD's appreciation of their unusual war experience as recorded in diaries, post-war lectures, memoirs, and exercises in autobiography. The RNACD's tour of the Eastern Front is examined here through the prism of these overlapping fields of interest. The unit's experiences shed light both on the operation of the wartime alliance, and on the ways in which the alliance, and the war, were understood.

### **Formation and Transfer to Russia**

The dispatch of the RNACD to Russia was driven by military expediency, desire for a physical exhibition of British military support for Russia's war effort, and the careerism of Oliver Locker Lampson, the unit's commander. Locker Lampson was a conservative unionist MP who raised funds by subscription in the first months of the war, both for the Ulster Division, and for his own unit of armoured cars. This kind of 'private assistance' was vital, in Locker Lampson's view, if the War Office were to put trained and equipped divisions in the field immediately on the outbreak of war.<sup>8</sup> He had hoped his motorized unit might be attached to the Ulster Division, but the Admiralty (rather than the War Office) were the only service developing armoured cars at this time.<sup>9</sup> Although Locker Lampson is frequently credited with having personally financed the unit (at a cost of £30,000), correspondence in his personal papers makes clear that the money was raised through subscription, and supplemented by Ulster Unionist funds.<sup>10</sup> Locker Lampson also engaged in a vigorous recruitment campaign, touring Belfast and East Anglia (his family home was Newhaven Court, at Cromer in Norfolk) in an armoured Lanchester car.<sup>11</sup>

Locker Lampson's squadron was initially sent to Belgium, but by the spring of 1915 it was apparent that the cars were not much use in entrenched conditions.<sup>12</sup> Wells

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<sup>8</sup> Locker Lampson to Robertson, 10<sup>th</sup> September 1914, Norfolk Record Office OLL3316/1-2

<sup>9</sup> Locker Lampson to Churchill, 30<sup>th</sup> October 1914, Churchill Archive, Cambridge CHAR13/45/67; Locker Lampson to Admiralty, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1914, The National Archives (TNA) ADM1/8403/428.

<sup>10</sup> Locker Lampson to Revelstoke, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1915, OLL3317/1-3, Locker Lampson to Admiralty, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1914, OLL179/115

<sup>11</sup> Smiles to Locker Lampson, 10<sup>th</sup> November 1915, OLL138/126

<sup>12</sup> Inspecting Commander, HM Armoured Car Force, to Air Department, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1915, TNA AIR1/147/15/64.

Hood remembered that because the cars could not be used to advantage, their machine guns were removed and placed at strategic points in the Belgian line of trenches.<sup>13</sup> General Bridges of the British Military Mission in Belgium gave Locker Lampson a blunt appreciation of the utility of the armoured cars in October: 'I do not think they will get any scope here this year.... putting an occasional machine gun in the trenches is not pulling your weight'.<sup>14</sup> Locker Lampson maintained that, as volunteers, his men viewed the prospect of inaction so seriously that some had asked to leave.<sup>15</sup> There were rumours that the War Office planned to appropriate the cars, remove their armour and guns, and use them for transport purposes.<sup>16</sup>

Locker Lampson was strongly opposed to any such plans to disband his unit. In March 1915 he learned that the Russian military liaison officer in Belgium, Andrei Prezhbiano, was negotiating the transfer of a comparable Belgian unit of armoured cars to the eastern front. He began lobbying through Prezhbiano, the Russian Government Committee in London, and the Russian Embassy, for a similar transfer for his own squadron.<sup>17</sup> There was evidently a sound military rationale, and the record demonstrates considerable enthusiasm amongst Russian military representatives about securing the squadron. In April the Russian General Staff instructed the Russian Government Committee in London that it was 'desirable to secure the squadrons with their whole personnel'.<sup>18</sup> In October, when negotiations had not moved on, Prezhbiano asked the Assistant Minister of War for 'immediate instructions in order that this advantageous affair does not fall through'.<sup>19</sup> He highlighted both the military and the publicity value of the enterprise: so too did General Ermolov, the Russian military attaché in London, who urged swift approval, emphasizing 'how useful they would be to our armies on our front, and what a particularly good political impression would be created if [Locker Lampson], as a Member of Parliament, could command such a unit and fight with our

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<sup>13</sup> Wells Hood lecture f. 22.

<sup>14</sup> Bridges to Locker Lampson, n.d. [October 1915], OLL173/10-11

<sup>15</sup> Locker Lampson to Broqueville, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1915, OLL173/49

<sup>16</sup> Locker Lampson to Boothby, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1915, OLL162/3

<sup>17</sup> On the Belgian armoured car unit see August Thiry and Dirk Van Cleemput, *King Albert's Heroes: Hoe 400 jonge Belgen vchten in Rusland en de VS veroverden* (Antwerp, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Leontiev to Timchenko-Ruban, 29<sup>th</sup> March/11<sup>th</sup> April 1915, in *Report on RNAS armoured car squadron under Commander O. Locker Lampson... serving in Russia* (London, 1918).

<sup>19</sup> Ignatiev to Anaksagor, 27<sup>th</sup> September/10<sup>th</sup> October 1915, Rossiyskiy Gosudarstvennyi Voenno-istoricheskii Arkhiv (RGVIA) Fond 15304, Op. 1, ed. Khr. 201, II. 64.

army in the East'.<sup>20</sup> Sybil Pinkerton, the wife of one of the men 'caught in the net' of Locker Lampson's recruitment drive in Belfast, understood the unit's mission to be 'a Propaganda exercise to demonstrate to the Russians that the Allies were prepared to support her'.<sup>21</sup> The unit's transfer fitted into a broader culture of enterprises aimed at Anglo-Russian understanding in wartime, from the film unit that toured the Russian provinces showing films about the western front, and the Petrograd and Moscow propaganda bureaux that placed coverage of the British war effort in the Russian press, to the (unrealized) project for Russian village elders to be sent to the western front, in order to bring back their impressions.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, Locker Lampson's dogged refusal to have his war project derailed was just as important. By October, when Ermolov finally wrote to Locker Lampson officially, asking him to 'bring these squadrons with their armaments and personnel under your own personal command to Russia', considerable negotiation had gone on behind the scenes. Locker Lampson had cleared the arrangement with the Belgian Prime Minister and the Chief of the Belgian Staff. He had recruited 250 additional men, making the unit up to three squadrons, and negotiated the addition of 20 cars that had already been dispatched for use by the Russians. He had arranged transport for his cars and men to Archangel'sk, and was waiting only for official sanction from the Admiralty, and for the Foreign Office to formally offer the unit to the Russian Government.<sup>23</sup>

### **Conflict and Cooperation in the Anglo-Russian Alliance**

Whatever its value as a gesture of Anglo-Russian cooperation, the transfer of the RNACD to the Eastern Front was nearly undone at the outset by confusion and infighting between and within departments both in Britain and Russia. On the British side, the arrival of Locker Lampson's unit faced strong opposition from Sir George

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<sup>20</sup> Ermolov to Admiralty, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1915, OLL179/111; Prezhibiano to Bridges, 17<sup>th</sup> October 1915, Koninklijk Legermuseum-Musée Royal de l'Armée 5720/1834-1836.

<sup>21</sup> Sybil Pinkerton, 'From Ice to Rice: the story of John Dick Pinkerton', Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) D3754 f. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Keith Neilson, 'Joy Rides?: British Intelligence and Propaganda in Russia, 1914-1917' *Historical Journal* 24:4 (1981) pp. 885-906; M. L. Sanders, 'British Film Propaganda in Russia 1916-1918' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 3:2 (1983) pp. 117-129; Minutes of the Anglo-Russian Commission, 29<sup>th</sup> August and 11<sup>th</sup> September 1917, TNA FO395/106

<sup>23</sup> Locker Lampson to Masterton-Smith, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1915, FO371/2456; Ermolov to Locker Lampson, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1915, OLL2865/6.

Buchanan, the British Ambassador at Petrograd. Buchanan formally offered the armoured cars to the Russian government in the autumn of 1915, and communicated their acceptance, but was unaware that the unit would comprise not only cars but also personnel. In December 1915 he was alarmed to hear that 40 British officers and 522 non-commissioned officers had arrived at Alexandrovsk: 'no information has been sent to me about them... I am placed in a very awkward position by receiving such information from Russian instead of British Military authorities'.<sup>24</sup> This situation was symptomatic of a wider problem. Whilst most communications concerning Russia had been channeled through the embassy at Petrograd before the war, the wartime alliance necessitated a wider responsibility for policymaking and a new range of points of contact.<sup>25</sup> The Ministry of Munitions, the War Office and the Admiralty were all involved, not to mention ad hoc interventions between people travelling between the two countries or already in Russia. Buchanan often felt he was being bypassed: officials at the Foreign Office thought so too, and frequently minuted this on communications.

Within the Russian General Staff there were conflicting views about whether the armoured cars were wanted or not. There was 'a section of the Russian military and naval authorities who favour retaining the detachment' and 'a strong party in the General Staff against it'.<sup>26</sup> Russia's politicians were also divided, with the Minister of War opposed to the squadron's arrival in Russia, and the Minister of Marine keen to keep them.<sup>27</sup> The men's wages were one factor. The agreement Locker Lampson and Ermolov had drawn up specified that the British government would provide the cars, but that the Russian government would supply them and pay the recruits. As mechanics and drivers, all men in the force were Petty Officers: their pay was around six times that received by infantry on the western front, and exorbitant by Russian standards.<sup>28</sup> The British War Office and the Russian General Staff were at least united in their desire to scapegoat Ermolov, who they regarded as responsible for the whole affair: he was

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<sup>24</sup> Buchanan to FO, 17<sup>th</sup> December 1915, FO371/2456

<sup>25</sup> Keith Neilson, *Strategy and Supply: the Anglo-Russian Alliance 1914-17* (London, 1984) p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Buchanan to FO, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1916, FO371/2746

<sup>27</sup> Buchanan to FO, 15<sup>th</sup> February 1916, FO371/2746

<sup>28</sup> 'Sailors of Fortune', Anglia TV, 6<sup>th</sup> November 1988; Buchanan to Balfour, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1917, ADM1/8484/69

‘perfectly useless’ and had ‘been so long in England that he had become a regular “Club Englishman”’.<sup>29</sup>

The situation was not helped by the unit’s late start and exceptionally rough journey. Unable to reach Archangel’sk, Locker Lampson made local arrangements to land at Alexandrovsk, exaggerating the risk of both pneumonia and dysentery on board the *Umona*.<sup>30</sup> The cars were so severely damaged that they had to be sent back to England to be overhauled: meanwhile the Senior Naval Officer in the White Sea ‘strongly deprecated’ Locker Lampson’s plan to train and acclimatize his men at Alexandrovsk over the winter. The most sensible option, he asserted, would be for them to return home and come out to Russia again when navigation opened.<sup>31</sup> A war of telegrams ensued. Locker Lampson did his best to influence matters from Alexandrovsk, telling the Admiralty that everything was in good order for their winter stay, and instructing Buchanan that he had received ‘a special message from England’ asking the unit to stay put.<sup>32</sup> The men in Locker Lampson’s unit had some idea what he was up to: PO Reed wrote to his wife that ‘if rumour speaks the truth we should all be on the way back now, because we heard that our Commander had orders from the Admiralty to return as we couldn’t get through. But he sent back to say that it was impossible as all the men were ashore.’<sup>33</sup> Buchanan telegraphed to the Foreign Office that the Russian General Staff would be ‘immediately relieved if Locker Lampson motor detachment returned to England and they never heard anything more of it’, and that the desire for the recall of the unit was ‘freely expressed by officials in Petrograd from Minister of War downwards’. Buchanan pointed out (and was backed on this by the Foreign Office, again unhappy that he was being short-circuited) that ‘this sort of very expensive misunderstanding would be avoided if arrangements for such undertakings were made through Embassy for my staff understand Russians and are capable of dealing with them’.<sup>34</sup> Not only were the men’s wages prohibitive, they

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<sup>29</sup> Saltwell to Nicolson, 19<sup>th</sup> December 1915, FO371/2456, and Buchanan to FO, 20<sup>th</sup> January 1915, FO371/2746

<sup>30</sup> Locker Lampson to Admiralty, 10<sup>th</sup> January 1916, OLL178/458; Locker Lampson’s unpublished autobiographical typescript ‘Nothing to offer but blood’, GB206 Liddle Collection RUS30, Brotherton Library Leeds, ff. 114-116.

<sup>31</sup> S.N.O. White Sea to Admiralty, 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1915, 17<sup>th</sup> January 1916, AIR1/147/15/64

<sup>32</sup> Masterton-Smith to O’Beirne, n.d; Buchanan to FO, 30<sup>th</sup> December 1915, FO371/2456

<sup>33</sup> Reed, undated letter, IWM 11324

<sup>34</sup> Buchanan to FO, 20<sup>th</sup> January 1915; Masterton-Smith to Drummond, 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1915; Buchanan to FO, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1916, FO371/2746



would be a 'constant anxiety' to the Russian authorities as they would not be satisfied with Russian food or accommodation, and would cause friction with the Russian rank and file owing to their higher pay and special treatment.<sup>35</sup> By late January it seemed certain that the unit would return to England: consensus in the Foreign Office was certainly in favour of it, and on 26<sup>th</sup> Buchanan telegraphed that the Emperor had decided that the armoured cars were to return home.<sup>36</sup> An Admiralty telegram to Locker Lampson around this time warned him not to intervene, as 'disposal your squadron is being considered by authorities concerned'.<sup>37</sup>

Aware that the 'middle policy' of returning to England and returning to Russia later was unlikely in fact to result in their return, Locker Lampson fought back.<sup>38</sup> He secured inspections from British naval officers in the region: Captain Nugent, who reported that the unit were well accommodated and in good health, and that he was impressed with the manner in which they had adapted themselves to their 'peculiar situation'; and Captain Kemp, who promised to advocate for this 'hardworking and efficient' force in Petrograd.<sup>39</sup> Admiral Ugryumov at Archangel'sk agreed to support their retention at Alexandrovsk if the men could be used to unload cargoes at the port.<sup>40</sup> The matter was resolved when Locker Lampson arrived in Petrograd (travelling back to England and then through Norway), and secured an audience with Nicholas II, during which he presented a letter from the King offering the service of the armoured cars. Alfred Knox, the British military attaché in Russia, who shared Buchanan's feelings about Locker Lampson, reported that 'acceptance by the Russians was rendered necessary when Locker Lampson arrived and presented to the Emperor letter from the King some months old'.<sup>41</sup> Locker Lampson spent a week at Stavka, the Russian military headquarters, renegotiating the agreement for his unit to stay.

Buchanan and Knox exacted a minor revenge when they stymied Locker Lampson's attempt to have his men appear in Petrograd: he had been drilling them for

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<sup>35</sup> Buchanan to FO, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1915, FO371/2746

<sup>36</sup> Buchanan to FO, 26<sup>th</sup> January 1915, FO371/2746

<sup>37</sup> Admiralty to Locker Lampson, undated, OLL199/119

<sup>38</sup> The Admiralty confirmed that a return would mean 'abandoning all idea of employment in Russia'. Admiralty to Phillimore, 1<sup>st</sup> February 1916, AIR1/147/15/64

<sup>39</sup> Locker Lampson to Admiralty, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1916, Nugent to Vaughan Lee, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1916, AIR1/147/15/64; Gregory to Locker Lampson, n.d. [January 1916], OLL139/35; Gregory to Locker Lampson 13<sup>th</sup> February 1916, OLL139/74

<sup>40</sup> Phillimore to Admiralty, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1916, AIR1/147/15/64; Masterton-Smith to Drummond, 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1916, FO371/2746

<sup>41</sup> Knox to Ellershaw, 7<sup>th</sup> May 1916, FO371/2746

a review in front of the tsar. Transporting the men and their necessities via Petrograd would interfere with vital transport of war materials, they argued: they were sure Locker Lampson's men were also anxious to get to the front.<sup>42</sup> If it was not any longer possible to withdraw the squadron altogether, 'which would undoubtedly be the best course for our prestige and dealings with the Russians', then they should be trained straight through Vologda to the Caucasus.<sup>43</sup> The personal animosity aside, it is clear that Buchanan and Knox felt the British armoured car unit had the potential to damage, rather than cement, Anglo-Russian relations.

### **Armoured cars and their uses**

Armoured cars were a recent innovation, and at the outbreak of war in 1914 their design and strategic purpose were uncertain. In 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain they had been championed by motoring and military enthusiasts, but not by the military establishment.<sup>44</sup> The first cars dispatched to France and Belgium by the Admiralty Air Service were rather hasty mock ups: Lieutenant-Commander Wells Hood described them as being 'of very primitive design', only bullet proof at over 150 yards, and with the driver encased in something which 'resembled the top half of a coffin'.<sup>45</sup> Many of those involved were pioneers both in design and use of the cars, and were pushing for recognition of the work they could do. Wells Hood drew up designs in his spare time, and was several times sent back to England to examine new cars. He also oversaw repairs in the field, where engines and gearboxes were fixed up with 'wood plugs, soap, "plasticine", etc', or by 'running melted lead revolver bullets into the damaged aluminium bases'.<sup>46</sup> The Russian military, who were ahead in their appreciation of the utility of armoured cars, ordered small numbers before 1914 from British and French firms, and continued to do so throughout the war.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Buchanan to FO, 16<sup>th</sup> March 1916 and 5<sup>th</sup> May 1916, FO371/2746

<sup>43</sup> Knox to Ellershaw, 7<sup>th</sup> May 1916, FO371/2746

<sup>44</sup> David Fletcher, *War Cars: British Armoured Cars in the First World War* (London, 1987), pp. 1-6.

<sup>45</sup> Wells Hood lecture f. 2.

<sup>46</sup> Wells Hood lecture ff. 52-53, f. 60.

<sup>47</sup> Details of Russian purchases before and during the war, and of cars built or armoured in Russia during the war, can be found in B. T. White, *Tanks and other Armoured Fighting Vehicles 1900-1918* (London, 1970) pp. 109-187. For their employment on the eastern front see Kolomiets, *Bronia Russkoi Armii*.

The uses to which armoured cars were put were also fluid, and were understood in different ways. As they were pioneered by the Royal Naval Air Service, one interpretation was that they were intended to work in conjunction with aircraft: either by protecting airfields, or in joint reconnaissance and attacks on enemy patrols.<sup>48</sup> Another mooted purpose was that they were to act as a fast moving fighting force, doing work traditionally performed by cavalry. These were also the broad purposes for which a pre-war commission had concluded they might be used in the Imperial Russian Army.<sup>49</sup> During their two years in Russia the RNACD developed their own sense of where and how they could be used to good purpose. They were used for reconnaissance, although not in combination with aircraft. They were used to storm villages held by the enemy, a tactic developed in Belgium but put to good effect, for example, at Roobla on the Romanian front.<sup>50</sup> They were also however used to storm trenches, work which those driving and commanding the cars resisted and resented. James MacDowell repeatedly complained to his diary about this misuse, and in the winter of 1916 Commander Gregory issued specific instructions that the cars were ‘not designed to press an attack home against infantry entrenched’: the heavier cars should mainly be regarded as armoured car destroyers, but could be used against villages, sandbag redoubts, etc’.<sup>51</sup>

They were found to be extremely effective in covering a retreat, as they could remain in action at the front under enemy attack, while a more or less orderly retreat was organized. They had what Locker Lampson described as ‘unique opportunities’ to try this out, both in the Romanian and Galician campaigns.<sup>52</sup> At Vizirul in Romania, the British armoured cars covered the 4<sup>th</sup> Siberian corps while they retreated, making a display of fire at the front line trenches until half an hour after the Russians had left.<sup>53</sup> PO Smith recalled that the cars ‘raced up and down harrying the enemy at all points, doing everything and anything to gain a few moments’ respite’ for the retreating

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<sup>48</sup> Wells Hood lecture f. 3; Pinkerton, ‘Ice to Rice’ f. 2, L R Hulls, ‘A Right and a Left’, IWM 4043, f. 5.

<sup>49</sup> Bruce Menning, *Bayonets before bullets: the Imperial Russian Army 1861-1914* (Bloomington, 1992) pp. 232-3.

<sup>50</sup> Smiles’s report, ADM116/1626

<sup>51</sup> James MacDowell diary, 29<sup>th</sup> November 1916, PRONI T3896; Gregory to Smiles, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1916; Gregory to Wells Hood, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1916, ADM116/1626

<sup>52</sup> Locker Lampson report of 16<sup>th</sup> August 1917, CHAR2/95/38-71

<sup>53</sup> Smiles’s report, TNA ADM166/1626; Gregory to Locker Lampson, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1916, OLL139/40

forces.<sup>54</sup> In retreat, Locker Lampson pointed out, they had the additional advantage of knowing the roads along which their retreat and the enemy's advance would be conducted.<sup>55</sup> The cars were generally taken in to action backwards, reversing towards the enemy.

While the Eastern Front offered greater opportunities for a war of movement, the condition of the roads often prevented the effective use of the cars. In the Caucasus Smith judged that they were 'taking cars over passes and roads that had never before been traversed by mechanically propelled vehicles'. Roads were 'mere tracks or existed only in the imagination'.<sup>56</sup> At Braila King reported that they had all their work cut out to get through the appalling mud, 'and this – mark you! On a road marked as "chaussee" on the map'.<sup>57</sup> In Galatz in early 1917 eight weeks of continual snowfall made it impossible to use the cars. They could not travel after dark because of the large number of potholes and fear of damaging the cars (headlights at the front were not allowed). On numerous occasions the guns were removed from the cars and set up in trailers, or operated in the trenches. While the cars were used for purposes other than those intended, RNACD men often ended up fighting without the cars.

### **Questions of supply**

The experiences of the RNACD in Russia also tell us something about the Anglo-Russian supply relationship. As it became apparent that the Allies were fighting a war of much longer duration than they had anticipated, questions of finance and supply became central to the functioning of the Anglo-Russian alliance. By the end of 1914 the British Government had already authorized loans to the tsarist regime amounting to £60,000,000.<sup>58</sup> With loans from their allies the Russian government placed orders overseas for the military equipment and ammunition they needed to service their war effort. Russian purchasing was arranged through several ad hoc committees: the inter-allied *Commission Internationale de Ravitaillement* (CIR), set up in August 1914 to coordinate orders and prevent competitive purchasing driving up prices; the Russian

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<sup>54</sup> C. J. Smith typed recollections, GB206 Liddle Collection RUS30, f. 21

<sup>55</sup> Locker Lampson, 'Nothing to offer but blood' f. 104

<sup>56</sup> Smith recollections ff. 18-20

<sup>57</sup> King, 'Ten Months' f. 7

<sup>58</sup> Keith Neilson, 'Managing the War: Britain, Russia and Ad Hoc Government' in Michael Dockrill and David French (eds.), *Strategy and Intelligence: British Policy During the First World War* (London, 1996) p. 106

Purchasing Commission at the War Office (later the Russian Supply Committee at the Ministry of Munitions) which looked after Russian orders in Britain; and the Russian Government Committee, established in early 1915 to give representatives of the Russian War Ministry closer oversight over purchasing in Britain. There were numerous tensions in the supply relationships: perennial purchasing outside the CIR and other control mechanisms by the Russian War Ministry; British reluctance to authorize Russian purchases for which there was not shipping available, and to ship orders when material was still not unloaded at Russia's northern ports; and the tendency of British and American firms to accept payment for orders they could not fulfill.<sup>59</sup>

In Alexandrovsk and Archangel'sk, members of the RNACD witnessed the difficulties in supply first hand. Archangel'sk was the first port of choice for shipping munitions from Britain to Russia, but there was substantial congestion at the port, and the seasonal nature of shipping routes complicated matters further.<sup>60</sup> The RNACD were tasked with unloading boats at Alexandrovsk that had not made it to Archangel'sk, organizing the wharf and repacking machinery for transportation to the front.<sup>61</sup> PO Reed noted 'all around here and up to Archangel the Quays are packed with munitions of war which can't get away until spring, also there is millions of pounds of stuff still on the boats not touched.'<sup>62</sup> Surgeon Lt. Commander King described Archangel'sk as 'the scene of feverish activity' in the summer months, with 'miles of extra wharfage' constructed to berth the ships constantly arriving.<sup>63</sup> PO Smyth also reported 'piles and piles of wood on each side, dozens of ships of all sorts, shapes and sizes... All the boats have government stores, munitions, rifles, barbed wire etc'.<sup>64</sup>

The RNACD also dealt directly with the munitions problem. While isolated in the north, a party led by Commander Wells Hood was dispatched to run ammunition

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<sup>59</sup> Neilson, 'Managing the War'; see also the early chapters of Christine White's *British and American Commercial Relations with Soviet Russia 1918-24* (Chapel Hill, 1992) especially pp. 16-74. D. S. Babichev, 'Deiatel'nost Russkogo pravitel'stvennogo komiteta v londone v gody pervoi mirovoi voyny (1914-1917) *Istoricheskie zapiski* 57 (1956) pp. 276-292 and A. L. Sidorov, *Ekonomicheskoe polozhenie Rossii v gody pervoi mirovoi voyny* (Moscow, 1973) pp. 252-310 also still provide valuable accounts of wartime economic cooperation despite the times in which they were written.

<sup>60</sup> On the transport of war material and attempts to extend the seasonal use of the northern ports, see David Saunders, 'Icebreakers in Anglo-Russian Relations (1914-21) *International History Review* 38:4 (2016) pp. 814-829

<sup>61</sup> Locker Lampson to Admiralty, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1916, OLL178/424

<sup>62</sup> Reed diary, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1916

<sup>63</sup> King, 'Ten Months'

<sup>64</sup> Smyth diary, 28<sup>th</sup> May 1916

from Murmansk to the railhead at Petrozavodsk, as the Murmansk-Petrograd railway was under construction but far from complete. Up to 100 tons of ammunition per day were being worked across a 200-mile line, using relay parties of men, reindeer, and sleighs.<sup>65</sup> Wells Hood described seeing new French and Japanese rifles, and ‘a very large number of old French rifles dated 1874’ with lead bullets ‘the size of the end of one’s finger’.<sup>66</sup> Wells Hood’s party also guarded German prisoners of war who were constructing the new railway. He wrote to James MacDowell that the prisoners ‘seemed astonished to see British troops so far north and in Russia’.<sup>67</sup> In Alexandrovsk, men of the armoured car unit mounted and manned a gun to guard the point where the telegraph cable to England entered the sea: there were fears that an attempt would be made to cut it.<sup>68</sup> This was an unenviable job in freezing temperatures, and with a bitter wind.<sup>69</sup>

The process of ordering for the unit itself was circuitous. The RNACD was technically part of the Russian Army, but most of their supplies came from the Admiralty. The Russian Government Committee in London held credits for their use, and both the CIR and the British Treasury had to sanction purchases before orders could be submitted to the Admiralty. Even when they bought from Russian sources the invoices were directed to the Russian Government Committee, and John Delmar Morgan, who looked after the unit’s affairs in England, was informed through the CIR to what extent their credit had been depleted.<sup>70</sup> Locker Lampson regarded the ordering process as ‘unsatisfactory’ and ‘very slow, sometimes being three months behind time’.<sup>71</sup> Repeated attempts were made to simplify matters, but in the spring of 1917 the Provisional Government brought in new and equally complex ordering arrangements. Orders now required the sanction of a new committee dealing with external purchasing in Petrograd, and this at one point left the unit completely without credit or authorization for supplies.<sup>72</sup> Locker Lampson and Delmar Morgan used the substantial Russian contribution to the unit’s upkeep so far to press for further British financial

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<sup>65</sup> Wells Hood lecture f. 36; Smith recollections f. 9

<sup>66</sup> Wells Hood lecture f. 36

<sup>67</sup> MacDowell diary, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1916

<sup>68</sup> Reed letters, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1916; Smyth diary, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1916; Gregory to Locker Lampson, 26<sup>th</sup> March 1916, OLL139/69

<sup>69</sup> Pinkerton, ‘Ice to Rice’ f. 4

<sup>70</sup> Delmar Morgan to Adjutant General of Marines, 24<sup>th</sup> November 1917; Accountant General of the Royal Navy to Delmar Morgan, 19<sup>th</sup> June 1917, ADM116/3943B.

<sup>71</sup> Locker Lampson to Admiralty, 7<sup>th</sup> November 1917, OLL179/155

<sup>72</sup> Korotkevich to Delmar Morgan, 5<sup>th</sup> May 1917, OLL172/40; Anrep to Admiralty, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1917, OLL172/239

support, and for new cars. The RNACD was after all ‘the only British Force in foreign lands, the expense of which does not fall completely on the British Government.’<sup>73</sup> Here Locker Lampson and Delmar Morgan found themselves in chance agreement with George Buchanan, who after the February revolution lobbied for the Admiralty to start paying for the unit themselves. James Masterton Smith, Private Secretary to the First Lord of the Admiralty, rebuffed this approach on the grounds that no such request had been made by the Russian government, and noted Buchanan’s longstanding prejudice against the unit.<sup>74</sup> Masterton Smith had cut through the complex financial arrangements back in 1915, when the agreement on financing the unit was signed, noting that while the Russian government agreed to pay for the supply and upkeep of the RNACD, ‘no doubt they will borrow the money from us to enable them to do so!’<sup>75</sup>

### **Ambassadors of the Anglo-Russian Alliance**

In a speech to the force reported in the press, Locker Lampson insisted that ‘upon our lonely shoulders falls the duty of maintaining in Russia the prestige of British arms and traditions’.<sup>76</sup> In fact a range of Allied enterprises operated on the eastern front: some official and some voluntary, some pragmatic and some symbolic. The RNACD came into contact and cooperated with a number of them. Their direct counterpart was the Belgian armoured car division, which had reached Russia in the autumn of 1915 and (unlike the RNACD) had been inspected by the Tsar at Peterhof. They took part in Brusilov’s successful offensive on the Galician front in the summer of 1916, and crossed paths with the British unit – militarily and socially – during the Kerensky offensive and the Galician retreat.<sup>77</sup> The memoirs of members of the Belgian unit record similar frustrations posed by unfamiliar ways of operating, by the road conditions and particularly the rain and mud.<sup>78</sup> The RNACD encountered French

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<sup>73</sup> Locker Lampson to Churchill, 12<sup>th</sup> March 1917, OLL164/19; Delmar Morgan to Grant, 19<sup>th</sup> January 1917; Delmar Morgan to Masterton-Smith, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1917, ADM1/8484/69.

<sup>74</sup> Masterton-Smith to Branch, 12<sup>th</sup> April 1917; Buchanan to Balfour, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1917; ADM1/8484/69. The Admiralty sanctioned £15,000 for new cars in 1917.

<sup>75</sup> Masterton-Smith to Drummond, 25<sup>th</sup> October 1915, FO371/2456

<sup>76</sup> Press cutting in GB206 Liddle collection RUS30

<sup>77</sup> Smyth diary, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1917 and 1<sup>st</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> August 2017

<sup>78</sup> H. Semet, ‘Ma deuxième mission en Russie pendant la guerre’ *Bulletin Belge des Sciences Militaires* 1:2 (1939) pp. 109-132; Capitaine Van der Donckt, *Avec le corps Belge des auto canons dans la révolution Russe* (Brussels, 1920); Marcel Thiry, *Le tour du monde en guerre des autos-canons belges 1915-1918* (Brussels, 2003).

aviators in Romania, and an Anglo-French flying mission in Galicia.<sup>79</sup> In Romania in the winter of 1916-17 they often saw a team of British demolition experts, headed by Colonel Norton Griffiths M.P., who had a 'roving commission with instructions to destroy factories and machinery likely to be of use to the enemy'. Prior to the retreat members of the RNACD were drafted in to assist with this work: Gerald Smyth reported destroying 'dynamo lathes boilers engines etc' in factories in Galatz, and PO Smith recalled setting fire to fields of wheat, and smashing oil wells with depth charges, sometimes under shotgun fire from Romanian farmers.<sup>80</sup>

There was also Anglo-Russian cooperation in the medical sphere. In Petrograd, an Anglo-Russian hospital financed by British fundraising efforts was established in the autumn of 1915.<sup>81</sup> The armoured car division collaborated more closely with the Scottish Women's Hospital, who had an outpost at Reni on the Romanian front. The surgeons attached to the RNACD helped at the hospital, and in early 1917 they helped to evacuate the staff and their stores.<sup>82</sup> King commented both on the 'excellent work' and 'splendid efficiency' of the Scottish Women's Hospital, and on their politics, describing them as 'funny old dears... of the suffragette type': 'Their rig consisting of breeches, very short skirt and sputters would cause a smile in England, but no one here seems to take much notice of it'.<sup>83</sup> At Pidhaysi in Galicia, there was also a Russian Red Cross Hospital run by 'two English lady surgeons', which proved 'a very convenient place to which to send our wounded'.<sup>84</sup> Temporary surgeon Scott raised subscriptions from private patients in England to bring out up to date medical equipment to Russia: he recorded having raised £100 in one day.<sup>85</sup>

Despite the variety of Allied enterprises at work in Russia, the RNACD were evidently regarded as a promising focus for publicity, and considerable effort went into maximizing the public impact of their stay in Russia. At the beginning of June 1916 they began a two-week journey to the Caucasian front. No opportunity was missed en

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<sup>79</sup> MacDowell diary, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1916; King, 'Ten Months' f. 13, f. 17

<sup>80</sup> Smyth diary, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1916, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1917; Smith recollections f. 22

<sup>81</sup> Peter Waldron, 'Health and Hospitals in Russia during World War I' in Christopher Bonfield, Jonathan Reinartz and Teresa Huguet-Termes (eds.), *Hospitals and Communities 1100-1960* (Oxford, 2013) p. 381.

<sup>82</sup> MacDowell diary, 18<sup>th</sup> December 1916; Smyth diary, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> January 1917; King letters 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1917

<sup>83</sup> King, 'Ten Months' f. 14, King letters 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1917

<sup>84</sup> King, 'Ten Months' f. 19; Smyth diary, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1917

<sup>85</sup> King letters, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1916



route to fête the unit, deliver speeches, and present them with tokens. In Archangel'sk they were met with crowds, bunting and a brass band playing 'warlike tunes'.<sup>86</sup> In a speech celebrating the wartime alliance, the Deputy Mayor called on several local examples of Anglo-Russian rapprochement. He recalled Richard Chancellor's landing nearby in 1553 and Chancellor's subsequent meeting with Ivan IV, along with the 'courteous return' in 1912 of a church bell looted from Zaiatskii island (one of the Solovetskii islands) by a British naval detachment during the Crimean War.<sup>87</sup> The RNACD were presented with an icon featuring the patron saint of Archangel'sk, Archangel Michael, which they were to carry into battle.<sup>88</sup> The British Vice Consul at Archangel'sk felt their brief stay demonstrated their potential as a source of publicity for the alliance. Their influence on the military situation might be slight, but their journey through Russia would bring home 'the fact of the alliance and of the British share in it to many Russians in all classes of society, to whom it has hitherto made little active appeal'.<sup>89</sup>

From Vologda (where the officers were given a banquet at a local hotel and the men received shashlik, black bread and soup) they were met at 'almost every stopping place' by a band, meals and speeches. Wells Hood recalled this as 'more of a nuisance than a pleasure' as it meant sleeping in one's clothes, and being frequently woken.<sup>90</sup> At Alexandrov Pinkerton noted: 'The band out and all that sort of rot. You have no idea how fed up one gets with it'; and at Rostov MacDowell recalled turning out at 5.30 am for a 'rotten' meal.<sup>91</sup> Robert Bruce Lockhart, the British Vice Consul in Moscow, gives some insight into the hasty preparations for the unit's reception in the city, which he had learned about only on the day they were to arrive. Moscow residents, both English and Russian, were mobilized to provide tours of the city. The RNACD were given lunches and dinners by the officers of the Moscow Automobile Section, and by the

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<sup>86</sup> Young to Buchanan, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1915, FO371/2746; Smyth diary, 30<sup>th</sup> May 1916; MacDowell diary 30<sup>th</sup> May 1916

<sup>87</sup> Young to Buchanan, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1915, FO371/2746. On the Zaiatskii bell see Roy Robson, *Solovki: The story of Russia told through its most remarkable islands* (New Haven, 2004) pp. 160-1, pp. 193-5.

<sup>88</sup> MacDowell diary, 30<sup>th</sup> May 1916. Owing to the 'fanatical' Protestantism of some members of the unit, Paul de Coninck, a Belgian Catholic and the unit's translator, looked after the ikon. Paul de Coninck, *Un volontaire de la guerre 1914-1918* (Merksem, 1971) p. 67.

<sup>89</sup> Young to Buchanan, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1915, FO371/2746. On Douglas Young in Russia see Andrew Rothstein, *When Britain Invaded Soviet Russia: the consul who rebelled* (London, 1979).

<sup>90</sup> Wells Hood lecture f.43-44

<sup>91</sup> Pinkerton, 'Ice to Rice' f. 6; MacDowell diary, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1916

British Club. There were ‘a good many speeches in which both the English and the Russian officers expressed their firm belief in the Anglo-Russian entente and in the final triumph of the allies’.<sup>92</sup> On the third day the RNACD, accompanied by a military band, marched from the Yaroslavl Station to the British Church: partly as a result of the good weather their procession through ‘the principal streets of Moscow’ was cheered and ‘pelted with flowers’ by a large crowd.<sup>93</sup> The British Press Bureau in Moscow used their contacts to secure coverage of the visit by the local press.<sup>94</sup> Some elements of British cultural output of the war had made it to the eastern front. King commented (and he is supported in this by Wells Hood) that ‘whenever a band catches sight of any English uniforms they insist on playing “Tipperary”’. They must think it a sort of national anthem of ours. They have even got as far as singing a Russian version of it’.<sup>95</sup>

Locker Lampson also made sure that his force had a public profile at home. Their arrival at various stopping places was reported in the *Daily Chronicle*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Sunday Pictorial*. Photographs of their exploits in Alexandrovsk, Moscow, and later Galicia (where they were heralded as the ‘bright spot in the Russian retreat’) appeared in the papers. At several times the unit were accompanied by British journalists – in Romania by Scotland Liddell of *The Sphere*, and in Galicia by George Mewes, a photographer for the *Daily Mirror*.<sup>96</sup> In a report to the Admiralty, Locker Lampson credited ‘the presence now of Englishmen in khaki, the photographs of them daily and weekly in the Russian papers, the cinematograph films appearing throughout the towns and villages of Russia’, with ‘a complete change of public opinion’ about the British role in the war.<sup>97</sup>

Locker Lampson was also anxious to demonstrate that the Russians valued his force for their contribution to the military effort on the eastern front. He kept a series of testimonials from officers of the Russian army (Captain Krotkov, the Senior Naval

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<sup>92</sup> Lockhart to Buchanan, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1915, FO371/2746

<sup>93</sup> Lockhart to Buchanan, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1915, FO 371/2746; Smyth diary, 4<sup>th</sup> June 1916; MacDowell diary, 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> June 1916

<sup>94</sup> Lockhart to Buchanan, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1915, FO371/2746. For more on Lockhart’s work in Moscow, see R. H. Bruce Lockhart, *Memoirs of a British Agent* (London, 2002).

<sup>95</sup> King letters, 4<sup>th</sup> December 1916; Wells Hood lecture f. 45

<sup>96</sup> Gregory to Locker Lampson, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1916, OLL139/40; Hanna to Locker Lampson, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1917, OLL137/62; King, ‘Ten Months’ f. 22; Scotland Liddell, *Actions and Reactions in Russia* (London, 1917)

<sup>97</sup> Locker Lampson to Admiralty, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1916, OLL178/432-3.

Officer at Kola, General Trotsky of the Vladikavkaz Cadet Corps, and General Sirelius of the 4<sup>th</sup> Siberian Corps for example) to illustrate their utility when lobbying the Admiralty for support.<sup>98</sup> Some British representatives also testified to their good reputation: Admirals Jerram and Phillimore both reported to this effect. Phillimore recalled that ‘The Daily Report at Head Quarters often contained flattering references to their services’, and that they had won many medals between them.<sup>99</sup> This last point is borne out by their personnel records. Most common was the silver breast medal with a St Stanislas ribbon, awarded to 237 members of the unit. Around 190 awards of St George’s medals, or the higher St George’s cross, were made.<sup>100</sup> The most prestigious award was Walter Smiles’s Order of St George, a decoration for officers that King recorded was ‘very highly-prized in the Russian Army, and is more or less the equivalent of our D.S.O.’.<sup>101</sup> Whether the medals awarded are any real measure of regard for their contribution is a moot point: certainly some in the unit believed the Russians handed them out like toffees. In *Billy Goes to War*, one character suggests that neither British or Russian authorities paid close attention to who received the medals: ‘I bet the Russians said ‘Here we’ll give you fifty medals to keep the boys happy’. And our officers stuck pins in fifty names’.<sup>102</sup> British decorations were harder to come by. In 1917, a request for decorations was rebuffed on the grounds that ‘the present time is not one for making awards to forces in Russia, which country is trying to negotiate a separate peace’. Locker Lampson protested that the RNACD were ‘in no sense responsible for the conditions in Russia’.<sup>103</sup>

### **Encounters on the Eastern Front**

The Great War engineered an array of unexpected cultural encounters: within armies, in different theatres of war and prisoner of war camps, and through propaganda.<sup>104</sup> We have already seen that members of the RNACD regarded events in Russia as exotic and

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<sup>98</sup> ‘British Squadron of Russian Armoured Cars’, ADM1/8484/69

<sup>99</sup> Masterton-Smith to Branch, 12<sup>th</sup> April 1917; Phillimore to Carson, 12<sup>th</sup> March 1917, ADM1/8484/69

<sup>100</sup> RNACD personnel records in ADM116/1717

<sup>101</sup> King letters, 31 January 1917

<sup>102</sup> Marlow, *Billy Goes to War* p. 90

<sup>103</sup> Locker Lampson to unknown recipient, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1918, ADM116/3943B.

<sup>104</sup> See the work of the project team ‘Cultural Exchange in a Time of Global Conflict’: [www.cegcproject.eu/about](http://www.cegcproject.eu/about), and on colonial encounters, Santanu Das, ‘Indian Sepoy Experience in Europe, 1914-18: Archive, Language and Feeling’ *Twentieth Century British History* 25:3 (2014) pp. 391-417.

found it difficult to relate their experiences to their understanding of the ‘real war’ on the western front. Certainly they felt themselves much cut off from home – particularly in Alexandrovsk, where few mails or newspapers were received, but also once they were at the front.<sup>105</sup> There were frequent complaints about lost and delayed mail, which when it appeared, was at best three months and at worst a year out of date.<sup>106</sup> While Surgeon Lt-Commander King remarked that ‘Now and again we hear all sorts of rumours about successes by the allies, but its impossible to believe all one hears’; PO Reed asked his wife if conscription had been introduced yet, how Wimbledon were getting on, and whether the war was yet finished.<sup>107</sup> In fact the delay in news was not always bad – King managed (with ‘a prolonged struggle of dictionaries’) to read about Asquith’s resignation (5<sup>th</sup> December) on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1916, and Smyth heard about the death of Kitchener (5<sup>th</sup> June) on 12<sup>th</sup> June.<sup>108</sup> But the perception that they were badly cut off persisted nonetheless.

The challenges of the Russian language contributed to this feeling. Language was an issue for officers negotiating the unit’s movements, for medial staff working with their Russian counterparts, and in the daily transactions of all the men of the unit. They had Russian liaison officers and interpreters; some officers also spoke Russian, and many diarists in the division kept notes of essential terms. Occasionally they met Russians who spoke English.<sup>109</sup> More often they communicated in French, as with General Korolkov of the 4<sup>th</sup> Siberian Corps, who played chess with officers of the division and frequently invited them to ‘entertainments at the “Sobranie” or mess’.<sup>110</sup> King conversed in bad German with a doctor on the Romanian front in January 1917, and regretted the ‘Tower of Babel trouble’ was preventing his getting attached to a Russian field hospital.<sup>111</sup> On the other hand language difficulties did not prevent members of the RNACD playing football with the Russians, going to the theatre, or

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<sup>105</sup> Knights to relatives of RNACD, 26<sup>th</sup> January 1916, GB206 Liddle Collection RUS30; Gregory to Locker Lampson n.d., OLL139/37

<sup>106</sup> Fred Goodier diary, 31<sup>st</sup> August 1916, private collection of Margaret Bozic. Pinkerton, ‘Ice to Rice’ f. 3, f. 10; Smyth diary, 8<sup>th</sup> December 1916

<sup>107</sup> King letters, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1917; Reed letters, 6<sup>th</sup> Jan 1916

<sup>108</sup> King letters, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1916

<sup>109</sup> King, ‘Ten Months’ f. 17, Pinkerton, ‘Ice to Rice’ ff. 10-11.

<sup>110</sup> King, ‘Ten Months’ f. 13; King Letters 9<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> January 1917; Smyth diary, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> June 1916; Pinkerton, ‘Ice to Rice’ f. 6

<sup>111</sup> King letters, 5<sup>th</sup> January 1917, 31<sup>st</sup> January 1917.

making frequent visits to drinking dens: the ‘thieves’ den’, an underground place with a code knock, and ‘Boris’s’, run by an ex-Russian soldier with a poorly-set arm.<sup>112</sup>

The five months the RNACD spent in Alexandrovsk were not the most favourable start to their tour of the Russian fronts. The Senior Naval Officer for the White Sea described Alexandrovsk as ‘a tiny place’ with few inhabitants: before the war it had been ‘only the summer resort of whalers and fishing craft’. The village was surrounded by rocky, snowy hills, and it was impossible to get more than half a mile outside it without snowshoes or skis. ‘Roads – of course there are none. Luckily a lake at the back of the village affords a level space for exercise and drill’.<sup>113</sup> Wells Hood remembered the residents of Alexandrovsk being ‘very suspicious of us’, perhaps on account of their having taken over the school house, a club and a half-completed cinema for billeting purposes; perhaps also because they caused the prices at the two local stores to rise considerably.<sup>114</sup> Reports filed by and about the squadron emphasized that their billets were warm, uncrowded and well-lit; that they had fitted up a hospital and a bakery; and that all kinds of enterprises were carried on with vigor: classes in mechanics, gunnery, semaphore, and Russian for example.<sup>115</sup> They organized football matches and concerts, and sleighed for entertainment in the evenings.<sup>116</sup> However, many diary entries and letters written by men in the unit display a rather less rosy view of their predicament, ‘stuck in this miserable outlandish spot on short rations until the spring’.<sup>117</sup> Their clothing (which Locker Lampson had commissioned at home) was ‘a rotten rig to look at (leather coat, leather pants, rubber sea-boots and sheep-skin hat)’.<sup>118</sup> Food – a major preoccupation in many First World War diaries – caused rows that persisted from February through to May.<sup>119</sup> Locker Lampson had purchased a large supply of reindeer meat locally, which was supplemented by black bread, bully beef, salt-fat pork, peas and beans.<sup>120</sup> While Wells Hood recalled the men decorating their billets with ‘grotesque figures’ modeled from the bread, PO McCullagh devoted verses

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<sup>112</sup> Smyth diary 18<sup>th</sup> June 1916, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1916, 18<sup>th</sup> February 1917, 27<sup>th</sup> February 1917

<sup>113</sup> Nugent to Vaughan-Lee, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1916, AIR1/147/15/64.

<sup>114</sup> Wells Hood lecture f. 27, Nugent to Vaughan-Lee, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1916, AIR1/147/15/64

<sup>115</sup> Nugent to Vaughan-Lee, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1916, AIR1/147/15/64, Sam Hanna diary 2<sup>nd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> January 1916, GB206 Liddle Collection RUS30

<sup>116</sup> MacDowell diary 9<sup>th</sup> July 1916; Reed diary 7<sup>th</sup> March 1916 and 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1916; Smyth diary 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> February

<sup>117</sup> Reed, undated letter

<sup>118</sup> Pinkerton, ‘Ice to Rice’ f. 4, Locker Lampson, ‘Nothing to offer but blood’ f. 110

<sup>119</sup> Smyth diary, 12<sup>th</sup> February 1916, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> May 1916

<sup>120</sup> Wells Hood lecture f. 28, Locker Lampson, ‘Nothing to offer but blood’ f. 117

of poetry to the appalling food, and other members of the division penned a 'White Sea Hymn of Hate'.<sup>121</sup>

On their journey south in the spring of 1916, and on the Caucasian, Romanian and Galician fronts, members of the RNACD had ample opportunity to witness military and home front conditions. They observed the difficulties caused by overloaded rail networks. Even before leaving Alexandrovsk, PO Reed was aware that 'we shall be a good time travelling, by all accounts. The Russian Railways and Transport are very busy with munitions etc; and none too fast either.'<sup>122</sup> MacDowell estimated that the trains travelled at an average of 15 miles per hour.<sup>123</sup> As they travelled south, delays became 'more and more prolonged, the cause being congestion of the lines with military trains'. There were 'innumerable wearisome halts at passing places', and conflicting orders given by different divisional commanders. Passengers on King's train south were 'cheered up' by their conductor telling them that a 'a troop-train on an adjoining siding had already been hung up 2 days!'<sup>124</sup> Watching the passing countryside from the train, Pinkerton surmised that 'the big landlord is still top dog in these parts'.<sup>125</sup> In the autumn and winter of 1916 they noted inflated prices in the towns in which they were billeted. In Odessa MacDowell hoped that they wouldn't 'strike another town where the prices of things are so abnormally high': he 'had to pay about 3 / 4 times as much for everything as I should have done at home'. In Braila 'the prices were as exorbitant as they were in Odessa. A small loaf which would have cost 3d at home, cost here 2 francs = 1s 9d'.<sup>126</sup> Several diarists expressed surprise at the availability of vodka, despite the introduction of prohibition in 1914. Officers like Wells Hood and King had 'vodka and other intoxicants' pressed upon them at dinner in Moscow. Pinkerton noted the broader

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<sup>121</sup> Wells Hood lecture f. 28; Reed letters; Titterington to Hanna, 1<sup>st</sup> September 1929, GB206 Liddle Collection RUS30

<sup>122</sup> Reed letters, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1916. Recent scholarship demonstrates that, while seriously overstretched, the Russian railways managed record levels of traffic in 1915-16. See Tony Heywood, 'Spark of Revolution? Railway Disorganisation, Freight Traffic and Tsarist Russia's War Effort, July 1914-March 1917', *Europe-Asia Studies* 65:4 (2013) pp. 753-772. On the railway in question here, see Anthony Heywood, 'Supplying the Tsar's last war: the Archangel-Vologda railway, July 1914-March 1917, in V. I. Goldin and T. I. Troshina, *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia na Evropeiskom Severe i v Arktike v pervoi chetverti XX veka* (Archangelsk, 2015) pp. 245-273.

<sup>123</sup> MacDowell diary, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1916

<sup>124</sup> King, 'Ten Months'; King letters, 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> December 1916, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1917

<sup>125</sup> Pinkerton, 'Ice to Rice' f. 6

<sup>126</sup> MacDowell diary, 15<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> November 1916

availability of alcohol: in Alexandrovsk at Easter the main street was ‘the parade ground of the mighty drunk and the mighty near drunk’.<sup>127</sup>

The division’s medical staff commented on arrangements for treatment of the wounded. At Alexandrovsk Staff-Surgeon Scott and his team treated three survivors of the *Sappho*, who had made their way across the ice on foot when their ship, frozen in, had run out of supplies: they amputated half of one survivor’s foot, and three fingers on each of his hands.<sup>128</sup> On board the *Dvinsk* from Alexandrovsk from Archangel’sk they were responsible for 618 prisoners of war (many of whom had scurvy) and 450 sick Russian workmen.<sup>129</sup> At Topalul in Romania, they established a clearing station that treated more than 2,000 wounded.<sup>130</sup> In the aftermath of a series of explosions of war material at Bakaritsa in the summer of 1916, King worked for three days in a hospital at Archangel’sk, and described the hospital as under-equipped and understaffed to deal with the emergency. He noted the lack of eye instruments, and the ‘appalling atmosphere’ in the hospital as a result of each ward being sealed off. He found the Russians quicker than the English to amputate limbs, but offered some reluctant compliments to the Russian medics he worked with: he was ‘bound to confess’ that a ‘Russian lady doctor’ who he saw amputate a leg ‘did the job very well’.<sup>131</sup>

Keith Neilson’s assertion that the British believed Russian soldiers ‘capable of inhuman feats of bravery and endurance’ is in many respects borne out by the reflections of members of the RNACD.<sup>132</sup> Wells Hood for example wrote that ‘The Russians are splendid fellows and fight like Hell, live on practically nothing, and never complain... although they go into the trenches and never come out again for thirty days, they sing both when going in and coming out’.<sup>133</sup> Pinkerton had ‘generally pictured the Russians as poor gunners’, but ‘Their shooting was a revelation, almost as good as the Germans’.<sup>134</sup> RNACD members were impressed by Cossack troops, who they first saw

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<sup>127</sup> Wells Hood lecture f. 45; King letters, 4<sup>th</sup> December 1916; Pinkerton, ‘Ice to Rice’ ff.4-5. On prohibition see Patricia Herlihy, *The Alcoholic Empire: Vodka and Politics in Late Imperial Russia* (Oxford, 2002) pp. 151-2, and David Christian, ‘Prohibition in Russia 1914-1925’ *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies* 9:2 (1995) pp. 89-118.

<sup>128</sup> Locker Lampson report, January 26<sup>th</sup> 1916, OLL178/459; Goodier diary 18<sup>th</sup> January 1916.

<sup>129</sup> Staff-Surgeon Scott’s report, OLL178/434-437

<sup>130</sup> Locker Lampson, ‘Nothing to offer but blood’ f. 177; King letters, 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> December 1916.

<sup>131</sup> King, ‘Ten Months’

<sup>132</sup> Neilson, *Strategy and Supply* pp. 1-2.

<sup>133</sup> Wells Hood lecture, f. 61

<sup>134</sup> Pinkerton, ‘Ice to Rice’, f. 12

fight in the Caucasus: they were ‘splendid horsemen and awful looking toughs’, and made ‘short work’ of their Kurdish opponents.<sup>135</sup> In Galicia too Pinkerton found the Cossack division they were attached to be ‘fine fellows’ with ‘a great contempt for the Russian Infantry’... ‘they nearly eat your head off if you call them ‘Russian’.<sup>136</sup>

The stringent discipline in the Russian army came as a substantial shock to many of the men. PO Rodwell remembered the Russian soldiers being ‘treated like animals more or less’.<sup>137</sup> Pinkerton reported that the Russian soldier ‘can’t be out after 9 o’clock in the street. If an officer addresses him he must get to the salute and keep his hand there if the officer should keep speaking for one hour. He may not enter a first-class compartment or restaurant. He may not use the tramway without a permit and he has no civil rights’.<sup>138</sup> MacDowell likewise commented that ‘Military etiquette is very strict in Russia and no one except officers and people of high rank are allowed in the 1<sup>st</sup> class hotels and restaurants’. British officers were ‘compelled by the Russians to carry swords when out in the street’, and ‘the “fag” of returning the salutes of the Russian soldiers was terrible’.<sup>139</sup>

When the February revolution broke out (on 23<sup>rd</sup> February / 8<sup>th</sup> March), some of the RNACD were at Galatz, and others at Tiraspol. In Galatz, King heard about the uprising on 17<sup>th</sup> March, but received ‘very few details beyond the fact that there had been two or three days’ fighting in Petrograd’. In Tiraspol, Goodier recorded news of ‘grave trouble in the principal towns of Russia’ on 18<sup>th</sup> March, and in subsequent days noted that ‘the spirit of unrest is working its way into the citizens of this town’, as mass meetings of the military and civilian population were held.<sup>140</sup> Where officers or men offered explanations for the revolution they emphasized (as did other English observers) the pro-Germanism and corruption that had characterized the tsar’s court, and the liberalism and vigour of the new provisional government. PO Reed’s statement that ‘Now Russia may be able to do something’ was typical.<sup>141</sup> When they moved to

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<sup>135</sup> Pinkerton, ‘Ice to Rice’ f. 7; Reed letters, 28<sup>th</sup> August 1916

<sup>136</sup> Pinkerton, ‘Ice to Rice’ f. 14

<sup>137</sup> ‘Sailors of Fortune’, Anglia TV 6<sup>th</sup> November 1988. On discipline, hierarchy and social distance in the Russian army see Alan Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army: The Old Army and the Soldiers Revolt (March-April 1917)* (Princeton, 1980) pp. 34-6.

<sup>138</sup> Pinkerton, ‘Ice to Rice’ f. 9

<sup>139</sup> MacDowell diary, 4<sup>th</sup> June 1916, 31<sup>st</sup> August 1916

<sup>140</sup> Goodier diary, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> March 1917

<sup>141</sup> Reed letters, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1917; Wells Hood lecture ff.61-62. On Anglophone witnesses of the February revolution see Harvey Pitcher, *Witnesses of the Russian Revolution* (London, 2001) pp. 9-63.



Galicia in the summer of 1917, the revolution's impact on military operations was much more evident. Officers in the unit were taken aback by the existence of soldiers committees, the refusal to salute, and the scramble for places on a train regardless of class.<sup>142</sup>

Most officers' memoirs give the impression that the men of the RNACD were as horrified at the idea of equality in the army as their superiors, but it is clear that they had been equally horrified at the inequality that preceded it. Neither were they shy of resisting authority themselves. Both Pinkerton and Goodier recalled an incident with a Russian officer who was offended at not being saluted by RNACD men in a restaurant, and went to strike one of them: 'the man in question retaliated by hitting him with such a welt that he put him clean through a case of pastry'.<sup>143</sup> Goodier regarded the Russian officers as 'absolute pigs', but his diary expresses his own and his peers' contempt for the 'high-handedness and selfish nature' of the British officers too.<sup>144</sup> PO Reed described the men's resistance to the 'petty little rules' that were enforced upon them at Tiraspol, including not smoking in the streets, and wearing identification discs. In the week before the revolution, they staged their own protest: 'we all went on strike and we went out all smoking in to the town, then of course there were meetings and speeches.'<sup>145</sup> PO Smyth's diary tells us he went out in the evening 'smoking furiously and with no "discs" on', and that over 300 men had their names taken for refusing to wear ID discs.<sup>146</sup> While they sympathized with the lot of the Russian soldiers, this protest was not a demonstration of solidarity. A note pinned up in front of the Adjutant's office demanded that the RNACD men be 'treated as Britishers. We are neither convicts or conscripts'. They would not tolerate being 'made to be like the Russian soldier', and believed 'those in authority [in the unit] will have something to answer for' when they got back to England.<sup>147</sup> An order of 21<sup>st</sup> March that members of the unit 'must not enter into any conversation with Russian soldiers or take part in any demonstration', and that if they witnessed a demonstration they should return to their base, demonstrates the nervousness of officers of the unit.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> King, 'Ten Months' ff. 15-18.

<sup>143</sup> Pinkerton, 'Ice to Rice' f. 9, Goodier diary 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1916

<sup>144</sup> Goodier diary, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1916, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1916

<sup>145</sup> Reed letters, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1917

<sup>146</sup> Smyth diary, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1917

<sup>147</sup> Goodier diary, 28<sup>th</sup> February 1917, 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> March 1917

<sup>148</sup> Goodier diary, 21<sup>st</sup> March 1917

## **Intervention in the Revolution and Civil War**

One of the most controversial dimensions of the RNACD's Russian tour was their suspected involvement in the Kornilov affair of August 1917. In early August Kornilov, as Commander in Chief, moved troops of the Cossack 'Wild Division' towards Petrograd with the intention of occupying the city. The Petrograd Soviet organized forces to defend the city, with substantial help from the Bolsheviks: the incident strengthened the Bolsheviks' position in the capital and seriously discredited Alexander Kerensky as Prime Minister. The fullest account of Locker Lampson's complicity is given by Michael Kettle, who was told by an RNACD officer that Locker Lampson had set off to support Kornilov's move towards Petrograd, but had been stopped on the road by revolutionary soldiers.<sup>149</sup> George Buchanan tells us in his memoirs (and in reports to the Foreign Office) that he had been asked by Russian industrialist Aleksei Putilov to put the armoured car division at Kornilov's disposal. Buchanan refused: he regarded it as 'a very naïve proceeding... to ask an Ambassador to conspire against the Government to which he was accredited'. He 'would not betray their confidence', but 'would not give them either my countenance or support'.<sup>150</sup>

Locker Lampson's reports to the Admiralty in July and August 1917 were complimentary about Kornilov, but not unconditionally so: he was 'the outstanding figure in this country'; a 'resolute and honest man without fear'; but lacked 'knowledge of western life' and 'sympathy with democratic ideals'.<sup>151</sup> Locker Lampson's relations with Kerensky in Galicia were also good, and a testimonial from Kerensky praising the work of the armoured cars, written after the Kornilov affair, survives in Locker Lampson's papers.<sup>152</sup> It is clear from the diaries of the men of the unit, which record in fairly banal terms what they did each day, that the cars did not move, and there is no evidence that they knew what was going on: although Wells Hood, in a lecture after the war, made an oblique reference to their 'going to join Korniloff', whose 'intentions were to attack Petrograd'.<sup>153</sup> There is plenty of evidence however that Locker Lampson

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<sup>149</sup> Michael Kettle, *The Allies and the Russian Collapse March 1917-March 1918* (London, 1981) p. 56, pp. 62-63, pp. 87-89.

<sup>150</sup> George Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia and other Diplomatic Memories* (London, 1923) vol. II, pp. 175-176; Michael Hughes, *British Officials in Russia* p. 112.

<sup>151</sup> Locker Lampson's report, 16<sup>th</sup> August 1917, CHAR2/95/38-71

<sup>152</sup> Kerensky to Admiralty, 24<sup>th</sup> October 1917, OLL179/182

<sup>153</sup> Wells Hood lecture f. 67.

did not display a conventional obedience to structures and orders. In an incident in Husiatin in July, Locker Lampson had refused to get involved when asked by Bagration, the commander of the Wild Division, to help defend the town against armed deserters looting it – he replied that he must ‘only safeguard our stores and must not fire on Russians’. However, he did admit handing over to Bagration half a dozen Lewis guns and 50,000 rounds of ammunition, and to detailing instructors who would teach Bagration’s men how to use them.<sup>154</sup> The only contemporary report we have from Locker Lampson about the Kornilov affair states that on ‘the day, when [Kornilov] decided to attempt his coup d’etat, he asked for the use of our Armoured Cars. His staff subsequently attributed their failure to our refusal to cooperate. Within 7 days Mr Kerensky in conversation expressed much the same opinion’.<sup>155</sup>

Following the October revolution there were plenty of further opportunities for interventionist schemes. The bulk of the RNACD had been sent home on leave in September 1917, leaving only 80 men and five officers, with 113 cars, at their new base at Kursk.<sup>156</sup> On Christmas Day 1917 local Bolsheviks requisitioned the cars: the remaining members of the unit did their best to put them out of action before they were towed away.<sup>157</sup> Locker Lampson had no intention that they should return home entirely. In early October, in response to Admiralty requests for a report on their intentions, he insisted that ‘Mr. Kerensky specially asked me to stay... The Authorities are unanimous as to the advisability of not withdrawing this force at the moment’.<sup>158</sup> With the Bolsheviks in power, he suggested instead that the force should move south to join English forces in North Persia. British officials in Russia pointed out the impossibility of any such action. The Bolsheviks held the cars. They had no official sanction to move. There was no available train transport. The most important objection, in the view of Admiral Stanley and Generals Poole and Knox, was that to move to Persia they would have to pass through country held by the anti-Bolshevik leader Ataman Kaledin, and this would be taken as a move to assist him: no assertion of impartiality would be

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<sup>154</sup> Locker Lampson’s report, 16<sup>th</sup> August 1917, CHAR2/95/38-71

<sup>155</sup> Locker Lampson to Carson, 5<sup>th</sup> December 1917, CHAR2/95/73-81

<sup>156</sup> Delmar Morgan to Admiralty, 13<sup>th</sup> September 1917, ADM1/8484/69; undated ‘report on strength of force’, ADM116/3943B; Wells Hood lecture f. 67.

<sup>157</sup> Soames to Locker Lampson, 5<sup>th</sup> January 1918 ADM116/3943B; Locker Lampson, ‘Nothing to offer but blood’ f. 216; ‘Sailors of Fortune’

<sup>158</sup> Air Department to Delmar Morgan, 20<sup>th</sup> September 1917; Locker Lampson to Delmar Morgan, 14<sup>th</sup> October 1917, OLL177/224-7

believed.<sup>159</sup> The Bolshevik authorities would have been right to be suspicious. In a letter of early December Locker Lampson confirmed that ‘one of my officers is in touch with Kaledin now’: the cars might indeed be useful if ‘elements of order [should] coalesce in Russia and the South of Russia stiffen into resistance’.<sup>160</sup> A letter from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff to General Poole also demonstrates such mixed messages, typical of the period of Allied intervention. Firstly the CIGS stated that ‘you may give assurance that this detachment will not engage in any inter-Russian disputes’, but he followed this up with the suggestion to ‘get into touch with’ representatives of the armoured car force in Petrograd ‘so that any loyal Russians might assist this move on being told that the detachment does not intend to leave Russia altogether’.<sup>161</sup> Locker Lampson also had designs on the Belgian armoured car unit, and suggested that members might volunteer to join the British detachment moving south, but the Belgian Minister of War wanted his unit to be repatriated intact.<sup>162</sup> Despite Locker Lampson’s resistance, the cars were abandoned and the remaining British personnel were evacuated via Petrograd and Murmansk. Those men who returned to England were transferred to the Machine Gun Corps.<sup>163</sup>

In London Locker Lampson met with anti-Bolshevik Russians, lectured on Russia, and formulated interventionist schemes. His appointments in the winter and spring of 1917-18 included meetings at the Ministry of Information, with the Russian Ambassador Konstantin Nabokov and with General Poole, and lectures at the British Russia Club, the National Political League, in his constituency at Huntingdon, and at Ramsey Picture Palace.<sup>164</sup> The War Cabinet of 6<sup>th</sup> December 1917 discussed a proposal of Locker Lampson’s for the resurrection of an eastern front, which anticipated the cooperation of Kornilov, Kaledin, the Queen of Romania, the British Navy, American troops, and Russian prisoners of war, with the British armoured car unit (and their Belgian counterparts) acting as a police force to ‘patrol the roads between Kiev,

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<sup>159</sup> Stanley to Admiralty, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1917, ADM116/3943B; Poole to CIGS, 5<sup>th</sup> January 1918, ADM1/8484/69; Poole to CIGS 7<sup>th</sup> January 1918, OLL177/222.

<sup>160</sup> Locker Lampson to Carson, 5<sup>th</sup> December 1917 CHAR2/95/73-81; Locker Lampson to Steel, 27<sup>th</sup> December 1917, ADM116/3943B

<sup>161</sup> CIGS to Poole, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1918, ADM1/8484/69

<sup>162</sup> Cubin to Balfour, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1918; Moncheur to Balfour, 20<sup>th</sup> February 1918, ADM1/8484/69

<sup>163</sup> WO to Admiralty, 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1917, OLL 179/102; Delmar Morgan to Daw, 27<sup>th</sup> March 1918, OLL177/142.

<sup>164</sup> Nabokov to Locker Lampson, n.d., OLL 2707/1-3; Locker Lampson to Poole, 2 April 1918, OLL177/17

Moscow, Petrograd and the front'. Locker Lampson was confident he could raise a thousand further volunteer mechanics in America and Northern Ireland. This project sounds outlandish, but no more so than many interventionist schemes of this period. The War Cabinet asked for a report on the matter to be sent to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff.<sup>165</sup> In the summer of 1918 the Ministry of Information was seriously considering a propaganda mission in the Caucasus, to be headed by Locker Lampson, who would be supported by former members of the RNACD.<sup>166</sup> Arrangements for the transfer of 27 men from the Navy to the Ministry of Information were approved, but this project fell down because of objections within the Ministry that the Caucasus was not a suitable location for propaganda, and that the only kind of propaganda that would work was covert infiltration of workers committees, not 'an open propaganda unit of men who will advertise themselves as such and will stay in the best hotels'.

The cars remained a pretext for a return. Both Locker Lampson and Wells Hood put forward plans for a small force which could retrieve the cars (which Locker Lampson had 'spent a great deal of money on... which the Admiralty do not see their way to repay'), and in more aspirational terms might 'form the nucleus of an Anglo-Russian force', 'form a bodyguard for any Russian General of high command', or 'raise a Russian Army into a fighting condition'.<sup>167</sup> General Poole's opinion was that 'no practical result will be obtained by sending back any officers', and anyone who was sent should be placed directly under his command.<sup>168</sup> In early 1919, General Ermolov assisted Locker Lampson's efforts to be 'sent' back to Russia (to no avail), writing that General Denikin personally would value his knowledge and services in the anti-Bolshevik cause.<sup>169</sup>

Many officers and men of the unit did contemplate returning. Some went out to Basra in a new formation of armoured cars and fought with General Dunsterville

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<sup>165</sup> War Cabinet Minutes, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1917, in ADM116/3943B; Locker Lampson to Carson, 5<sup>th</sup> December 1917, CHAR2/95/73-81

<sup>166</sup> Snaggs to Admiralty, 10<sup>th</sup> May 1918, ADM116/3943B; Walker to Ministry of Information, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1918, FO395/184.

<sup>167</sup> Delmar Morgan to Adjutant General of Marines, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1918; Locker Lampson to First Lord of the Admiralty, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1918, ADM1/8484/69; Locker Lampson to Admiralty, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1919, OLL179/287; Locker Lampson to Admiralty, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1918, OLL179/303.

<sup>168</sup> Poole to Steel, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1918, ADM1/8484/69

<sup>169</sup> Locker Lampson to Yermoloff, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1919, OLL 172/50, and 21<sup>st</sup> February 1919, OLL2865/70.

against the Turks. They were still referred to as the ‘Locker Lampsons’.<sup>170</sup> Walter Smiles, who joined this unit, wrote that he was ‘ready to go back to Russia, the sooner the better’.<sup>171</sup> Leslie Hulls, who also served with Dunsterforce, was attached to the British military mission in Russia during the Second World War, and was still in touch with Smiles about all things Russian in the 1940s.<sup>172</sup> Reginald Gregory answered the advertisement for volunteers for the British mission with Denikin in South Russia: this would be ‘fighting over “old country”... with “old friends”, both English and Russian’.<sup>173</sup> King on the other hand recorded his intention to ‘wipe Russia off’ his ‘visiting list’ after the war, and PO Pinkerton recalled seeing the call for volunteers for Russia, and his friends wondering why he ‘did not bound forward’.<sup>174</sup> In the interwar years Locker Lampson remained involved in the anti-Bolshevik movement, funding and organizing anti-Bolshevik meetings and publications.<sup>175</sup>

### **Remembering the Royal Naval Armoured Car Division**

In 1918-19 there was substantial interest in Britain in stories of war and revolution in Russia, but despite the threat posed to the war effort by Russia’s withdrawal, and the perceived international threat of Bolshevism, these were often presented as adventure stories. In some respects this suited members of the British armoured car unit. CPO Checkley published a ‘stirring account of the work and adventures’ of the armoured cars, co-written by adventure writer H J Shepstone, in the *Wide World Magazine* from March 1918. Commander Wells Hood developed a lecture, with slides, about the exploits of the armoured cars: he told his audience he would not concentrate on ‘the horrors of warfare’, but rather on the ‘local colour’ of his experiences in Russia.<sup>176</sup> In the spring of 1918 Locker Lampson was offered ‘quite large sums’ by *Lloyds Magazine* for a series of articles. He wrote to Masterton Smith to enquire whether the articles would be ‘quite the thing to do’, assuring him that they would be based on ‘personal

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<sup>170</sup> Smiles to Locker Lampson, 7<sup>th</sup> May 1918, OLL138/18; Sailors of Fortune; Major General L C Dunsterville, *The Adventures of Dunsterforce* (London, 1920)

<sup>171</sup> Smiles to Delmar Morgan, 26<sup>th</sup> September 1917, OLL138/86

<sup>172</sup> Leslie Hulls papers, IWM 4043.

<sup>173</sup> Gregory to Locker Lampson, 13<sup>th</sup> October 1919, OLL139/107

<sup>174</sup> King letters, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1916; Pinkerton, ‘Ice to Rice’ f. 15

<sup>175</sup> Fedoroff to Locker Lampson, 11<sup>th</sup> October 1926, 13<sup>th</sup> February n.d., n.d. June 1927, Muriel Paget papers, Leeds Russian Archive MS1405.

<sup>176</sup> Wells Hood lecture f.70.

adventures', and would be 'of quite an innocuous character'.<sup>177</sup> Locker Lampson did not write an autobiography, but he drafted the table of contents, which indicates that such a book, if written, would have been equally full of derring-do, and equally detached from the reality of the RNACD experience in Russia. In one chapter he enters into 'secret negotiations' for the transfer of the armoured cars to Russia; in another, he personally persuades Kerensky to launch an offensive in the summer of 1917; and in a third he attempts to rescue the tsar by disguising him as an orderly with the armoured car unit.<sup>178</sup> The most outlandish example in this genre is Lieutenant Patterson's manuscript loosely based on his experiences in the RNACD – a mixture of bizarre stories about Locker Lampson and imaginings about the actions of a monk attached to the Russian armed forces.<sup>179</sup> These adventure stories reflect the sense of disconnection that members of the unit felt between their experience in Russia and the war on the western front. This disconnect is present in contemporary representations of the First World War too: while in Britain, France and the USA trench warfare in the west took centre stage in efforts to rationalize and remember the war, in Russia, the revolutionary watershed meant that for much of the twentieth century there was little interest in studying or commemorating the imperialist war that preceded it.<sup>180</sup> Despite the photographs and accounts of the RNACD's Russian tour that remain in archives and in private hands, the unit's Russian tour received little continued attention. While Norfolk-based veterans of the unit gathered together in a local pub to be interviewed for a 1972 Anglia TV documentary; little is remembered of the RNACD's Irish contingent, whose experiences were considerably at odds with the dominant narrative of the fate of the Ulster Division in France and Belgium.

In actual fact the RNACD's experiences exemplified many of the characteristics of the Anglo-Russian relationship in the First World War. The profusion of channels of authority, which complicated their arrival; the logistics of supplying war materiel; the wild interventionist schemes designed to keep Russia in the war at all costs. As a case study their tour of Russia illustrates both the workings of the alliance, and the kinds of cultural encounter that the 1914-18 war engineered: it gives us insights into the ways

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<sup>177</sup> Locker Lampson to Masterton Smith, 5<sup>th</sup> February 1918, OLL179/203

<sup>178</sup> Locker Lampson, 'Nothing to offer but blood'

<sup>179</sup> Patterson MS, in GB206 Liddle collection RUS30.

<sup>180</sup> Peter Gatrell, *Russia's First World War: A Social and Economic History* (Harlow, 2005) pp. 255-259; Joshua Sanborn, 'Russian Historiography on the Origins of the First World War since the Fischer Controversy' *Journal of Contemporary History* 48:2 (2013) pp. 350-352.

the war was managed, and the ways it was experienced and remembered. While some wartime structures imposed constraints upon the alliance – for example in terms of supply – it is clear that channels for decision-making, and the use of new technologies, could be fluid between and across the different fronts of the war. While both the British and the Russians inherited a repertoire of ideas about the alliance and about each other, there was also potential for new and unexpected encounters. In the revolutionary context, it is clear that, in contrast to the impression given by officers' accounts, a degree of solidarity was possible between soldiers in the British and Russian armies, but also that the men's sense of their own military identity imposed limits on this. In post-war reflections on their Russian tour, the sense of disconnection between the experience of war in the west and in the east is much stronger than the sense of a shared endeavor. The RNACD's Russian tour helps us to understand how the connections between the western and eastern fronts were understood and navigated, both by diplomats, strategists and those in charge of supply, but also by men confronting, and returning from, an unfamiliar theatre of war.